

Alternative **Tourism** Journal



A Conflict Between Two
Narratives

Alternative Tourism Journal is an initiative of the Alternative Tourism Group-Study Center Palestine (ATG). It is a journal which offers an alternative narrative of the situation in Palestine and the way it impacts on tourism.

ATG is a Palestinian NGO specializing in tours and pilgrimages that include a critical examination of the history, culture, and politics of the Holy Land. ATG operates on the tenets of “justice tourism” and seeks empowerment of the local community through affirmation of Palestinian cultural identity, and protection of eco-rights. Above all, ATG seeks to promote justice in the Holy Land with tourism as one of its instruments.

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Preface

Since the foundation of the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) in 1995, clear goals and vision were set in order to promote justice tourism as integral to the continued resistance of the Palestinian people for freedom and independence. These goals and visions were set consistent with the broader opposition against the policies of the Israeli Occupation. The strategies also took into account the unacceptable fact that the Israeli occupation uses Israeli tourism policy and practice to target the entire tourism and antiques sector in a way that erases the memory and history of Palestine. Indeed, Israel's intent was to shape tourism as a tool of shaping public perception in line with Zionist ideologies. Israel believed that such policy would enable Israel to control the heritage, religious, cultural and economic dimensions of Palestinian society.

In this booklet, the ATG continues its mission in raising awareness and providing studies on tourism in Palestine. The booklet also places challenges to its readers regarding how the Palestinian people and civil society and social and religious forces can enhance the resistance through non-violent mechanisms.

The studies in the booklet will focus on revealing the nature of the conflict in the tourism and Antiquities sector in Palestine, stressing the political and economic roles behind the monopolizing of the sector by the Israeli Occupation forces.

The Booklet contains three studies. Those are ;

-“Tourism and Heritage in Palestine; Conflict Between Two Narratives”. This study sheds light on the ideological dimensions and how the religious story is used to justify occupation and to distort history and logic. It also examines how the opposing narratives impinge on issues of culture and heritage and how Israel's, theft of culture and heritage and

the destruction of Palestinian history and Palestinian civilization in their homeland pose serious political dangers.

-The second study is titled, "Economic Disparity in Israeli's Tourism Monopoly –The Devastating Impact in Occupied Palestine - Israel's Stranglehold and Monopoly Over Holy Land Tourism and its Impacts." This study focuses on Israel's systematic policies that target, since the beginning of its occupation, the touristic places, in particular as well as the touristic industry as a whole to marginalize the rights of the Palestinians in this sector. It also sheds light on the Zionist propaganda that aims to pose the Palestinian in the image of a terrorist in the eyes of the international media, and to portray Israeli society as victim. It also falsely projects the whole of Israeli society as peaceful through tourism as instrument. The study also touches upon the challenges that face the Palestinians in this sector and the tasks required to stand against the falsehoods proposed through the tourism sector by Israel. The paper is clear about how the international community must compel Israel to respect international laws and regulations concerning the tourism sector.

-The third study is titled "Raising Awareness: Tourist Locations Occupied Post 1967 by Israel". This paper aim to raise the awareness of tourists on the locations in which Israel heavily invests and that lie in the Occupied Palestinian territories according to the International law and yet the Occupation invests in it.

Rami Kassis

Executive Director
Alternative Tourism Group



Tourism and Heritage in Palestine; A Conflict Between Two Narratives

Written for ATG by: Nassar Ibrahim, Director of Alternative
Information Centre (AIC)

Political dimensions and motives occupy a great space in their relation and interaction with various heritage fields and numerous human experiences. For every society, heritage constitutes a fundamental factor in plumbing historical and cultural depths. It expresses identity and interacts with the social, political, and environmental reality. It also confronts the questions and challenges that a society encounters in the course of its development, where identities, nationalities, ethnicities, and particularities are formed. Heritage did not start as songs, dances, food, clothes, architecture, and archaeology. It began in response to a dire need to fulfill the material, social, and spiritual needs of society. After it became rooted in the society, it was transformed into collective practices that, over time, became an organic part of the collective memory and behavior.

In this context, heritage becomes a cornerstone of tourism in all societies. Thus tourism means travelling of individuals and groups for entertainment, knowledge through identifying the country's specific culture and antiquities, history, civilization, religious and natural resources. In this sense, tourism has become a premier social, cultural, political and economic level activity that targets the spreading of culture, and civilization. It is also used as a tool to strengthen relations and interactions between humans, and between civilizations and nations.

Thus, tourism is an organized act of cultural, economic, social and political, and knowledge gaining activity. It is in these categories that the importance as well as dangers of tourism emanates. It is from the same categories from which emerge the programs and tourism policies of governments. It explains why huge financial outlays are made available for tourism. How else can one understand why research centres, colleges and universities allocate generous funds to explore the multiple dimensions of tourism?

Indeed, the tourist occupies a huge space, and, in turn, strengthens the feeling of nationalism and belonging to the nation, including the development of civilization and strengthen the role of the community. Defined as such, tourism and what is related to it became a form for resistance, and as much as it is used by nations or people to strengthen the historical role and people's acceptance by this role. Tourism has also become viable avenue too for outside interventions for the reason of rewriting history, especially by occupying forces. They do so by arrogating the political power and strength to gain a stranglehold on the weaker parts of the nation or on whole countries. The study of Anthropology has emerged as an instrument to understand how people think in order to control them. And at the same level, the marginalization process of nations and people in order to create a history for the occupying forces is launched.

As an example of this, we can remember how occupying forces stole Egyptian heritage, the theft of Iraqi museums, the destruction of Syrian antiquities, and the looting of Indian, African, and South American heritage. Within this narrative, the relation between the politics, tourism and heritage are identified. When a society faces internal political projects or external challenges, everything that can be moved to counterbalance these challenges will be brought forth, such as history, spiritual values, and social traditions that magnify and unify the nation to point it in the direction that can best serve it.

In the case of the decades-old Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the relationship between politics and heritage becomes even more vital and dangerous. This is because heritage in all its forms occupies a central position and plays a decisive and fundamental role in justifying and serving the political projects that are being executed at all levels.

The basis of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is built upon the confrontation and contradiction between two narratives - the Israeli-Zionist and the

Arab-Palestinian - where each attempts to use the particularity of the place (Palestine), including its religious, historical, and cultural significance, to justify its own existence and continuation.

The Zionist project concentrated from the very beginning on the religious Jewish narrative that sees in Palestine the Promised Land of the Jews. Hence any movement in this direction necessitated the rebuilding of the Jewish consciousness and turning it into a material and spiritual force to serve the Zionist project. The Zionist leadership thus defined its strategy and moved from the phase of awareness-raising to the phase of providing the necessary conditions for success.

Within this strategy, Palestine became a playground on which the space, the sphere, and the symbols were reformulated so that Palestine fitted into the Zionist narrative. In other words, a specific cultural heritage had to be constructed to harmonise with the religious narrative that tries to build legitimacy in order to justify the acquisition and control of the space with the aim of enhancing the project in the Jewish consciousness and creating an international support- movement.

Since 1948, the practical translation of this strategy has worked systematically and has been well organized in various fields and at all levels. The political and military plans coalesced to reformulate the reality and to rewrite the history of Palestine in a form that responds to the aims of the Zionist project and at the same time ensuring that this new narrative creates a convincing historical depth for the project. This comprehensive project precipitated one of the most vicious processes of fraud, annihilation, and mutilation the world has ever known. The history and the culture of an entire population were erased and replaced by another which aimed to ensure the containment of the memory of the space and its history.

Within this narrative, the implementation of Israeli policies has taken

two paths. First: destroy, mutilate, and neglect everything that confirms or is a reminder of Palestinian existence, Palestinian rights, or Palestinian history. The millennia-long history of Palestine is portrayed as though it started with the emergence of the Jewish religion when, in fact, Palestine and its people existed long before there was ever a Jewish presence. The magnitude of this policy culminated with the destruction of over 450 Palestinian villages in 1948 after their Palestinian inhabitants were expelled. The stones of these homes were stolen to be reused in the construction of Jewish homes as a sign of originality and genuineness.

After the creation of Israel, the following steps were taken: the theft of the archaeological findings, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls (which were discovered during the 1940s), pottery, and coins, and the claim of their “legal” possession; the destruction of several historic buildings that attest to hundreds of years of Palestinian existence; the destruction of Al Kasaba Quarter in Nablus during the second Intifada; the takeover of Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem, the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron, and Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus; the endless excavation beneath the Haram Al Sharif in Jerusalem, searching for Solomon’s Temple in an attempt to prove the right of the Jews to the so-called Temple Mount; the Judaisation of occupied East Jerusalem by removing entire Arab neighbourhoods and the deliberate policy of expelling the Palestinian population from the city, as is happening right now in Silwan, Bustan Quarter, and Sheikh Jarrah.

The policy of colonisation in the occupied territories aimed to swallow the largest areas possible; it cut the West Bank into smaller areas with no geographical continuity and isolates Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings. The building of the apartheid Wall is another step in this direction. The Wall has destroyed tens of archaeological sites and has facilitated the annexation of other sites to Israel. Moreover, the settlements and the separation wall have dramatically distorted the landscape.

Second: the implementation of Israeli policies has included rebuilding the symbols, names, and culture of specific places in order to confirm and prove the credibility and historicity of the Israeli narrative.

To achieve this goal, the Israeli authorities took over historic sites and changed their Arabic names, giving them names that match accounts from the Torah. This resulted in the renaming of hundreds of villages and archaeological sites. Examples include calling the West Bank "Judea and Samaria"; replacing Al Quds with Yerushalayim; transforming French Hill into Shapira Neighborhood; and calling Al-Khaleel "Hevron." In addition, settlements were given biblical names such as Kiryat Arba, Efrata, Ma'aleh Adumim; and the settlement on Abu Ghneim Mountain is now called Har Homa. Architecturally distinctive Palestinian houses were taken over, as in the Talbieh neighbourhood in Jerusalem, as were dozens of other buildings spread across historical Palestine. Within the framework of this policy of piracy, the Israeli authorities created nature preserves and built a zoo for animals mentioned in the Bible that includes specimens of the various wild animals indigenous to Palestine.

As a continuation of these policies, traditional Palestinian clothes have been presented in tourism books and offices and at international fairs as coming from the Jewish tradition. Even the Palestinian kaffiyeh, itself highly symbolic, was repackaged with the Star of David in blue. Dr. Muhammad Al-Bougi, of Al-Azhar University in Gaza, wrote in his book *Resistance and Folk Culture*. "After the 1967 War, Israel became active in controlling folklore and bought up thousands of Palestinian dresses that had been embroidered by Palestinian women. They were then sold in Europe with the label, "Made in Israel." The Israelis attribute everything to themselves: ownership of the land and its cultural and financial products is the Israeli plan on the ground."

One of the well-known examples of this policy is the export of the famous Jaffa oranges as an Israeli product, and the same thing goes for

Jericho dates. At the same time vast areas of olive groves - a Palestinian symbol of pride and belonging to the land - are destroyed. Even Dead Sea salts, used in cosmetics and health products are being sold as Israeli products. Hummus and falafel are also marketed by Israel as traditional Israeli dishes. Traditional songs and dances have also been appropriated by Israel.

Palestinians have resisted this methodical, organized Israeli policy and defended their rights and history by reaffirming the historical and cultural ties that have bound them to the land for tens of thousands of years. Dozens of centres for the protection of Palestinian folklore have been founded and have become active through the establishment of dance and folklore music groups that focus on the Canaanite influence on Palestinian culture. These centres also aid in renovating old houses in Palestinian cities, preventing the looting of archaeological artifacts, and soliciting the intervention of UNESCO to protect archaeological ruins by resisting Israeli assaults.

Civil and governmental institutions and organizations have tried to support the Palestinian tourism industry through developing folk industries and crafts such as olive wood and mother-of-pearl carving and In short, the relationship between tourism and heritage policy in the Palestinian case reflects the status of daily engagement that rise to the level of the conflict between the Israeli occupation in its various projects aimed at grabbing and rewriting history at the historic, cultural, symbolic and cultural level, and between Palestinian people who tried in various ways to defend their heritage and rights that the Israelis are trying heavily and aggressively to remove from the geography and history of the land. In this context, heritage in all its dimensions becomes a field goal for hiring all political connotations, and turning them into political reflections so as to redraft political awareness and memory and justify control and grab spaces and promote exclusion at all levels.





Economic Disparity in Israeli's Tourism Monopoly

The Devastating Impact in Occupied Palestine

Israel's Stranglehold and Monopoly over Holy Land
Tourism and its Impacts

Written by ATG-Study Center

Introduction

According to statistical information, in 2010 alone Israel received 3.45 million tourists which reflects a sustained growth in the number of tourists visiting The Holy Land. Most tourists who visit are from the USA, Russia, Eastern Europe, France, UK, and Asia (Korea, Philippines, and India). Africa also represents a growing segment with Nigerians being the largest from this continent. The trickle from Latin America is evolving and one can expect larger numbers in the future.

Israel claims to present a surplus of tourism products - historical and religious places, beach resorts, heritage locales, archaeological spaces, and nature spots. The industry relies on what has come to be known as a 'pilgrim market' to make its dramatic gains from the tourism industry. However, it is important, at the very outset, to underline that Israel has craftily appropriated a number of Palestinian sites and areas into its own market and parades these important locations as authentically Israeli. This has been possible because Israel, as the occupying power in Palestine, carries out the seizure of these sites through unlawful means. Through these machinations Israel has registered phenomenal growth in tourist numbers upward by 26% from 2009 and 14% more than in 2008 which represented the previous best. Tourism Minister Stas Misezhnikov has confirmed that direct "income from incoming tourism alone in 2010 reached 15 billion shekel (NIS), with another 10 billion NIS from domestic tourism and another 8 million NIS from outbound tourism".

The situation in Palestine stands in sharp contrast to the prosperity in Israel. Palestine's main attraction for a large proportion of visitors is the status of Palestine as the Holy Land. Traditionally, pilgrims have visited the country from all over the world. The conflict stemming from the occupation has caused a drastic reduction in pilgrimages. With restricted access to religious sites, the blockade of border crossing points, the

closure of Gaza airport, the separation wall and the image of insecurity projected abroad, tourism into Palestine has been drastically affected. Israeli tourist agencies have retained domination on archaeological and historical sites on the West Bank.

The on-the-ground reality is also in contrast to the hopes that were generated by the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993. In fact, after Oslo, tourism was expected to emerge as one of the most promising pillars in the development of the Palestinian economy. Based on sound policy foresight, millions of dollars were invested in tourism infrastructure projects such as the construction of hotels, recreation resorts, restaurants and related ventures.

History of Tourism in Palestine

The three monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—encouraged their followers to make pilgrimages to this Holy Land. Yet, until 1948, tourism in Palestine, especially in the cities of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron and Nazareth, was a marginal and undeveloped sector, visits by pilgrims and others to holy places notwithstanding.

That being said, the Zionist enterprise recognized the importance of tourism as a political tool several decades before the creation of Israel in 1948, and worked on the development of a Zionist perspective on Palestine in the hopes that tourists (Jewish tourists in particular) would, at the least, choose to financially support the Zionist cause, but the preferred outcome was the settling of Diaspora Jews in Palestine. The Zionist Information Bureau for Tourists was formed in 1925 with the goal of creating a “Zionist-flavored” approach to tourism in Palestine. This organization initially used its tours and guidebooks to merely describe the places of historical and spiritual significance to the Jewish people. But, beginning in 1937, the Hebrew translation of the guidebook, as well as the tours, now emphasized the construction of the modern Eretz Israel in ancient Palestine by focusing on new Jewish neighbourhoods and Zionist institutions in the land, particularly in Jerusalem.

The Zionist Information Bureau for Tourists, by using these mediums as well as others, such as maps and films, now imposed on Palestine an almost exclusively Jewish Zionist identity, essentially ignoring the presence and history of the Palestinian people. Up until this point, however, the Palestinians had managed to maintain a significant foothold in the tourist industry for themselves, despite the fact that the tourism market in Palestine was relatively undeveloped. This reality would change swiftly, though, following the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The creation of Israel in 1948 and the 1967 war, following which Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has had shattering political, economic and social impacts on the Palestinian population. In many ways, Palestine itself was virtually rendered extinct from the map, historic Palestine coming to be known as Israel. The division of Palestine into three entities (Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem) completely transformed the structure and market orientation of tourism. Some important tourist attractions, of natural beauty, and historical and religious significance, remained within the borders of Israel, and as a consequence, were inaccessible to tourists from Arab and Islamic countries.

In this context, tourism became a political tool in the supremacy and domination of the Israeli establishment over land and people and an instrument for preventing Palestinians from enjoying the benefits and the fruits of cultural and human interaction on which tourism thrives.

After 1967, the Palestinian tourism sector in general, and the hotel industry in particular, suffered a major decline in the quantity and quality of business. There was increasing competition from the Israeli tourism industry while physical, institutional and financial restrictions were imposed on Palestinian tourism. All in all, the tourism industry suffered greatly since the occupation and has remained underdeveloped. Strong pressures and profound changes have resulted in the effective separation of the Israeli and Palestinian tourism sectors and the marginalisation of Palestinian facilities. Apartheid is alive and well within the tourism sector too.

Yet, it must be said that despite years of occupation, the Arab private sector has managed to undertake limited tourism related activities despite the restrictions and problems due to occupation. Between 1976 and 1994, the number of Palestinian hotels remained unchanged. Very few permits to build or convert to hotels were granted by the Israeli authorities to any investors in the Palestinian sector.

At least 15 military orders and regulations related to tourism have been issued since 1967 by the Israeli military authorities, who have assumed responsibility for tourism in the Occupied Territories. These orders raised the level of requirements for licensing and functioning of tourist institutions, without availing those institutions of the means necessary for the required improvements. As a result of having quality requirements raised, but access to funding sources denied, many tourism firms were confronted with serious problems such as the often insurmountable challenge of unequal competition with Israeli firms, or demotion to lower tourist grades. Israeli tourism enterprises were offered long-term loans at concession interest rates, sometimes with part of the loan being turned into a grant. New Israeli tourism enterprises are eligible for tax reductions, especially when they face unexpected troubles. Vigorous government support for Israeli enterprises active in Israel has proved to be a major impediment to full and equitable competition with Palestinian enterprises, which are totally deprived of such subsidies and assistance .

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Palestinian Tourism: A Destination On the Move: 1993-2000

After the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1993, several necessary steps were carried out to promote and encourage tourism. First, was an economic agreement signed between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel on 4 May 1994. Secondly, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities was established and took responsibility for recognising and supporting the tourism industry in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Since its establishment, the Ministry of tourism has accomplished a great deal, including the reorganisation of internal transportation, restaurants, tourism agencies and other segments; and rehabilitation of religious and cultural centres.

Tourism planning in Palestine undoubtedly reflects and is directly influenced by the political economy and the political instability in the region. Nonetheless, the Palestinian Authority in general, and the Ministry of Tourism in particular, have managed to support and encourage the tourism industry and re-organise tourism facilities in the Palestinian cities and towns.

Economic Disparity in Israeli's Tourism Monopoly

Typically, however, the Israeli tourism industry does not reflect the reality of the occupation, but instead discourages travel to the Palestinian areas. An Israeli branding campaign for the tourism industry in 2008 was developed to intentionally deflect attention from the occupation.

The maze of unequal laws and restrictions give Israeli tour companies unfair advantages in their ability to provide seamless service for their groups. Tourists typically expect that when booking a tour that the tour agency will be able to take care of a variety of travelling details to save time before hand and prevent delays upon arrival.

For tourists who are unaware of these disparities, unequal standards for Israeli and Palestinian tour companies gives the impression that Israelis are more willing to “go the extra mile” in service and comfort for their customers. However, the reality is that Israeli policy blocks Palestinian companies from being able to do the same.

Even a cursory glance at how these policies affect tourists' experience is very revealing in terms of the impacts:

Border Control

I. Obtaining Visas: Some countries require a visa to travel to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Israeli tourist companies are able to manage this issue effortlessly, simply by submitting the names and passport numbers of everyone in the group. Palestinian agencies are not able to manage this process as easily and are unable to guarantee that they can do it on behalf of the tour. Sometimes their requests are refused without explanation; other times, a handful of names will be refused and those tourists have to obtain their visa for themselves.

2. Preference to Israeli Services: Preferential treatment to Israeli tour companies mean that Palestinian companies must do their best to work around many inconveniences and delays beyond their control that have an impact on their quality of customer service. These disparities apply not just to Palestinians in the West Bank, but also the Palestinians within the pre-1948 area, a population often referred to as Arab Israelis.

As an example of these disparities, Israeli tour companies have an advantage for making the best first impression when groups arrive at the airport. Palestinian tour guides are not permitted to go beyond the general receiving area in the airport when tours arrive. Israeli tour guides, however, are permitted to greet their tours at the gate as soon as they get off of the plane and welcome them warmly, as they go together to baggage claim and through customs.

3. Delays and Questioning of Tourists at Arrival: Tourists who reveal their intent or interest in visiting the Palestinian Territories risk facing delays at the airport in Tel Aviv or at the Allenby Bridge. Some are deported without explanations; others are told they are being sent back because they are security threats.

Planning a trip outside of one's home country requires significant time and money. The concern that expressing interest in visiting the Palestinian Authority area will result in refusal of entry is problematic; for some tourists this risk may discourage them from booking a Palestinian tour.

4. Time Spent at the Allenby Bridge: For tourists who are arriving by land via Jordan, the amount of time they spend getting through the border may depend on the company they hired. When a group arrives that will be led by an Israeli company, tour guides report that an extra queue is opened to bypass the lines and expedite the group's passage. When Palestinian tour companies have notified the authorities ahead of time, in hopes of also expediting the process, the result has been the

opposite, the tourists were not brought to a special line, and some were held for extended questioning that has sometimes resulted in several hours' delay.

Freedom of Movement

1.Limiting Movement of Tourists: In 2009, IOF introduced a passport stamp that limited tourist and visitors with family in the West Bank to travel only the West Bank. Some tourists expressing interest in visiting Israel only have reported being expected to sign a statement at the airport stating they would not enter the Palestinian area unless they contacted the IOF in advance. A few months later, following international criticism of the sudden appearance of the “PA only” stamp, the official explanation from IOF was amended to clarify that the stamp was given only to visitors who expressed interest in exclusively visiting the West Bank.

2.Checkpoints: As of 2009, Palestinians and tourists in the West Bank were forced to navigate 60 checkpoints throughout the West Bank and there are 39 more checkpoints between the West Bank and Israeli sovereign territory. Additionally, the Israeli military also implements “flying” checkpoints which appear and disappear without notice or reason. The West Bank has an average of 65 flying checkpoints every week.

Checkpoints cause significant delays, with roads backed up for hours—or closed altogether—making timely travel unreliable for tourists and locals alike.

3.Limitation on Movement of Palestinian Tourism Professionals: The Palestinian Ministry of Tourism recently offered 50 permits for Israeli tour guides to enter the West Bank so that tours spending time in both Israel and the occupied areas could do so. However, the Israeli Tour

Guides Association denounced the offer as a “risky gamble that exposes Israeli citizens to serious dangers.”

The only time that permits were granted by Israel to Palestinian tour guides to work in Israel was in 2005, when just 42 permits were issued. Due to a combination of emigration and aging, just 25 of those guides are still working. Yet, Israel will not issue any more permits for Palestinians – not even to replenish attrition – compared to 8,000 Israeli guides who are licensed by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism.

Absence of Policy and Regulations

I. Instilling Fear in Tourists: For tourists interested in visiting the area, their first point of reference might be the Israeli Ministry of Tourism. On that site, the “Frequently Asked Questions” addresses concern for safety and implicitly links Israeli’s assessment of safe travel to potential attacks by Palestinians.

Is it safe to travel to Israel?

No place in the world is 100% safe but Israel is a relatively safe country to travel in. In the past few years the security situation in Israel has been increasingly calm since the end of the Intifada. As a result, tourism to Israel has been growing steadily and last year alone approximately 2 million tourists visited the country.

The next question further implies a need to be fearful of Palestinians, along with the suggestion that Israeli military is serving as protector rather than oppressor.

Are tourists allowed to enter areas outside of the Israeli responsibility (Palestinian areas)?

Passage to the two major tourist cities of Bethlehem and Jericho in

the Palestinian Authority is direct without prior clearance or required authorization.

As regarding the rest of the Palestinian areas, it is recommended to forward requests to the IDF Public Relations Office, Fax: +972-2-5305724. All requests should include: Name, passport nationality and number, destination, name of departure into Palestinian Area Crossing if known; if crossing is by car – name and details of driver as well as car registration number. Fax replies will only be sent to Israeli tel./fax numbers.

The Israeli Ministry of Tourism offers no direct answer to “is it safe” but referring tourists to the IOF indirectly suggests that typically it is not safe. Furthermore, the only form of communication offered is via fax from inside Israel, which would mean the tourists are already there, or are booking through an Israeli tour company. This is hardly a sincere offer to communicate with tourists planning a trip, but rather a tactic to discourage tourists from trying to enter the PA. It is also important to note the reference to areas “outside of the Israeli responsibility” ignores occupation and implies the opposite – that the area is void of Israel’s influence altogether.

The Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) argues that travel to Palestine is secure. Hospitality is an extremely important value in Palestine, as it is throughout the Mediterranean world. Palestinians welcome visitors with open arms. While it cannot be denied that dangerous situations can arise due to the Israeli Occupation, the risk to international tourists is minimal.

Arab people in general and Palestinians in particular, have been demonized in the West for decades. They are often presented in the media as dangerous, conniving, and immoral. It is not uncommon for visitors to Palestine to experience a mix of emotions -- bewilderment,

confusion, delight, embarrassment, and anger -- when they realize how false those demonized images really are.

Negative stereotypes of Palestinians have been purposely reinforced by the Israeli government, which discourages international visitors to have contact with Palestinians. Israel knows that exposure to the present and historical realities of the situation have a transformative effect on the majority of tourists to Palestine, who return to their home countries as opponents to Israel's oppressive policies against Palestinians. The famous Israeli general and politician Moshe Dayan is known to have said that he would rather license a Palestinian to fly a jet fighter than license a Palestinian to be a tour guide. As such, Palestinians were prohibited from working as tour guides in the West Bank and Gaza until the 1990s. In the face of harsh propaganda, Palestinians encourage international visitors to suspend any preconceived notions they have about Palestinians until they have a chance to meet us face-to-face.

Israel is now steadily and deviously excluding Palestinians from a fair share of the Christian pilgrim market through various strategies. In a report in Committee for Accuracy in Middle East reporting in America (CAMERA), Tamara Sternthal concludes:

"Israel has spent millions of dollars refurbishing Christian sites in Israel and trying to create new ones, such as the recently launched "Gospel Trail," which allows hikers, bikers and motorists to retrace what may have been Jesus' path through the Galilee region. . . .

The Tourism Ministry is also promoting a Christmas Eve alternative to Bethlehem -- which is under control of the Palestinian Authority -- by inviting pilgrims and foreign diplomats to the Israeli city of Nazareth to enjoy a Christmas market, parade, fireworks display and jolly Santa Claus for the kids.

Palestinians complain that they are being cut out of a market they once dominated. Palestinian tourism officials say Israel is discouraging visits to areas administered by the Palestinian Authority and is promoting attractions in other parts of the West Bank, such as the baptismal site at the Jordan River.

“We have more sites on our side, and Israel is using them to develop their own tourism, leaving us with a smaller piece of the pie,” said Palestinian Authority Tourism Minister Kholoud Daibes, contending that Israel collects 90% of pilgrim-related revenue. “They are promoting occupied territory as part of Israel.”

2. Investment Laws, Zoning laws, and Infrastructure Development Jerusalem

Income generated from souvenir sales by merchants in Jerusalem has declined. Those whose livelihood depends on these sales have been facing barriers to maintain their businesses under the discriminatory practices obtaining from Israeli law. In the spring of 2010, the Israeli government began reviewing vendors’ licenses under the auspices of needing to renew them, only to not renew them at all. New permits are not being granted, so the only way a vendor can have such a license is to inherit one from a family member.

3.Zoning of Palestinian Areas Under Israeli Control.

Palestinian economic growth faces hardships because due to the restrictions of development of tourist areas, and severe challenges to provide infrastructure to accommodate tourism. Israel’s refusal to grant building permits means that additional hotels cannot be created, nor can the ones that are already built expand to accommodate more guests.

In the Bethlehem area, for example, all 5,000 hotel rooms were booked for Christmas in 2007, yet an estimated 20,000 visitors were in the area for the holiday. Without ability to accommodate additional tourists during peak season, Palestine loses the economic opportunity to hosts tourists for longer periods of time, resulting in tourists spending short day trips in Palestine, but returning to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem for hotel rooms.

Areas that could be prime opportunities for development for tourism in the West Bank cannot be developed due to Israeli restrictions. B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization, reports that while Israel develops tourism along the Dead Sea -- which is part of the West Bank -- it prohibits Palestinians from developing that area. Additionally, Christian pilgrims are limited in their exploration of the baptismal site of Jesus due to landmines in the area. Israel has acknowledged that tourism opportunities would increase if the mines were removed.

Branding and Promotion

In October 2011, Palestinian Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, challenged the organizers of the International Tourism Fair in Berlin (ITB) on their claims that they “have an ethical commitment towards promoting socially responsible tourism” . They called into question “the contradiction between that responsibility and hosting ‘Tel Aviv Gay Vibe’ an Israeli government led campaign to promote gay tourism to the city of Tel Aviv” . They demanded that instead of rewarding Israel for its inhumane and cruel occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, international structures should hold Israel liable for these crimes and, in fact, isolate it until it conforms to international law and ends the occupation based a just agreement. The persistent legitimizing of Israel at international fora smacks of connivance and co-option. With tourism being a money spinner for Israel, it must be acknowledged that directly and indirectly the income from tourism supports the occupation and the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation authorities. ITB simply cannot be permitted to be used as a platform to give credibility as an important tourism destination.

Other tactics to brand Israel as an important and must-visit tourist attraction have been employed. Prominent sports clubs such as Arsenal were co-opted to promote Israel as a tourist destination through a variety of means. Given the popularity of football around the world, it does become an unseemly sight when billboards, promotional goods, and popular consumer services become a tool of promoting an Israeli product. Such branding initiatives are being opposed by the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) campaign as a way of delegitimizing Israel at a time when its occupation continues.

Shaping Untrue Images of the Palestinian – Propaganda Through Tourism

Much of the global perception of Israel/Palestine is shaped by internationalist tourists. From headlines, internationalists know that significant attention is paid to Israel's relationship to Palestinians (or often inaccurately described as a conflict between “Jews and Arabs” in Israel). Typically, however, the Israeli tourism industry does not reflect the reality of the occupation, but instead discourages travel to the Palestinian areas. An Israeli branding campaign for the tourism industry in 2008 was developed to intentionally deflect attention to the occupation.

The avoidance of Palestinian areas on Israeli tours gives the message – sometimes implicitly and sometimes blatantly -- that Palestinians are dangerous and not to be trusted, despite the fact that no tourist has ever been hurt by Palestinians. Tourists who earnestly follow the warnings of the Israeli tour companies regarding the “terrorist zone” do not have the opportunity to experience the hospitality of Palestinians and learn about the occupation and community efforts for non-violent resolutions. They return home with false “confirmation” that Palestinians are indeed a threat to the safety of Israel and its tourists. Meanwhile in the West Bank, travel restrictions, travel delays, poor roads, and the separation wall erode the tourism industry on which Palestine relies heavily. (In Bethlehem, for example, tourism accounts for 80% of the economy.)

The maze of unequal laws and restrictions give Israeli tour companies unfair advantages in their ability to provide seamless service for their groups. Among the expectations tourists typically have when booking a tour is the agency's ability to take care of traveling details to save time before hand and prevent delays upon arrival.

For tourists who are unaware to these disparities, unequal standards for Israeli and Palestinian tour companies give them the impression that Israelis are more willing to “go the extra mile” in service and comfort for their customers. The reality, however, is that Israeli policy block Palestinian companies from being able to do the same.

Access to Media

Palestinian media has all the relevant capacities to interact with the international media at various levels- regional, and international. In the first instance, Palestinians have strong language skills, and, above all, a critical contextual alertness that allows them to delve deep into the issues while reporting events. They also have access to facts and analysis that can render their narratives of the situation compelling to potential travelers. Other parts of the media, however competent and wide their reach, could easily miss essential facts and analysis and be tempted to confine themselves to headline hitting news that focuses only around the conflict. And yet, access to wide audiences, notably international, is an important goal for the Palestinian media.

Raed Othman, Director of Ma'an News Agency (MNA), which is Palestine's main news agency for independent news from Palestine, underlines the importance of this international audience when he pointed out that: "The international communities are stake-holders in Palestine. They were stake-holders in the problem, and they will be stake-holders in the solution. So it is vital that we reach international audiences with an accurate, representative picture of what happens in Palestine."

While there are challenges that impede professionalism, the issue is not the standards of Palestinian competence but rather the challenges and pressures from the outside world. In the first place, there are prejudices that the Palestinian media must cope with. A report from Palestine is always treated with a question mark. The average international audience treats an exclusive report as one-sided – a treatment that does not always apply to Israeli narratives largely because their narratives are mouthed by western media outlets who are biased in favor of the Israeli. Palestinian media is also hampered in their institutional development due to the lack of resources for training to upgrade standards. An added

challenge is that the best reporters are offered higher paying agencies which entice them to move away.

Israel also imposes restrictions on competent Palestinian journalists fearing that their reporting will find willing takers in the international arena. Hence, they prohibit free movement and are denied press cards which would allow them access to the domains that matter in efficient press services.

These broad categories of fetters also apply to the tourism arena. Perhaps, the only recognized guide book on Palestine that is internationally accepted is the ATG publication: "Palestine and Palestinians". With international consciousness changing dramatically, the world needs strong and sustained messages on the issues in Palestine. The tourism sector is a very potent especially if tourists/pilgrims can be attracted to 'Come and See', to undertake as the ATG puts it: "a journey of truth and transformation that will reveal the love of God to you through the eyes of the Palestinian people who, despite having suffered decades of occupation and dispossession-- maintain their dignity, faith, and capacity for hope". The media must now become creative and innovative in telling the story using forms of pilgrimage that are transformative, patterns of justice tourism that resemble study tours, encounters- political, inter-religious, work camps, olive tree planting and olive picking, etc.

The opportunities that Palestinian media now have to make known the truth of the Palestinian reality to global viewers and readers rooted in their unique location-based knowledge and perspective could well define the contours of a form of media representation that guarantees that the Palestinian voice is directly heard rather than be a mere second hand narrative.

Factors Impeding the Development of the Tourism Industry in East Jerusalem

•**Israeli occupation:** The Israeli occupation of 1967 hindered the development and growth of the Palestinian tourism industry. The tourism industry in East Jerusalem struggled to win a market share in a highly competitive environment dominated by giant Israeli tour operators, hotels, entertainment venues and tourist restaurants. However, restrictive and discriminatory Israeli measures since 1967 have frustrated efforts by Palestinians to develop their tourism infrastructure.

•**Municipal taxes:** The Israeli-run Jerusalem municipality imposes a wide range of taxes on East Jerusalem tourism operators in return for fewer services than what their counterparts receive in the western part of the city. Municipal officials have designated the areas where the majority of the hotels, souvenir shops and tourist restaurants are located as grade 'A' areas, which means that the highest rates of taxes are collected from those outlets. However, municipal services in grade 'A' areas, which should be equal to those provided in the western part, are non-existent.

•**Shortage of land:** Of the 70.5 square kilometers of East Jerusalem, 34% has been expropriated, and 40% has been declared 'green belt' (usually a preliminary measure taken by Israel to freeze Arab construction before expropriation). The rest of the land has been utilized for residential and commercial purposes. Those wanting to invest in the tourism industry by means of building new hotels have complained of the reluctance of the Israeli municipality of Jerusalem to grant them the necessary permits. It is believed that the slow process of granting permits is meant to impede tourism development.

•**Cost of land:** Due to the shortage of land that is suitable for tourism development projects, the estimated cost of land is very high and starts

at around US\$ 400,000 per dunum. This may discourage potential investors given that the tourism industry, as it stands, is not necessarily profitable.

•**Limited expansion and develop options:** The majority of the hotels in East Jerusalem were not built specifically as hotels. Most were used for different purposes and hence minor physical alterations were later introduced. Most hotels in East Jerusalem cannot add annexes to the original structure although additional services, some of which are basic to modern hotels, require such expansion.

•**Absence of institutional support:** The absence of a national umbrella institution, such as a Palestinian ministry of tourism, capable of supporting the private sector in East Jerusalem further obstructed the development of the tourism industry. The Higher Council for the Arab Tourism Industry was only established in 1993; however, it is understaffed and has failed to meet the demands and expectations of the tourism industry.

•**Licensing procedures:** The licensing procedures for tourism projects and hotels in East Jerusalem are extremely prohibitive. The Israeli authorities deliberately impede the processing of any applications for tourism projects that have an interest in East Jerusalem. This tedious and complicated process deters investors and creates an unfavorable climate for tourism development and expansion.

•**Israeli labor laws:** Israeli labor laws, which are imposed on East Jerusalem, do not take into account the fact that tourism outlets in this part of the city do not enjoy the same income as those in the western part of the city. The price of a hotel room in West Jerusalem is often three times the price of a hotel room in East Jerusalem, yet Palestinian hoteliers are obliged to adhere to the same salary scales or else they may face being brought before Israeli courts.

•Fierce competition by Israeli hotels during the low season: Israeli hotels compete with Palestinian hotels in East Jerusalem during the low season. The hotels in West Jerusalem are modern and are equipped with the latest amenities. During the low season West Jerusalem hoteliers reduce room prices and offer discounts to travel agents and tour operators. East Jerusalem hoteliers cannot afford to offer similar advantages and thus lose their business to West Jerusalem during the low season.

Even though the above factors were identified as far back as in 1997, there has been little progress made to rectify the situation. Like the rest of Palestinian society, the tourism sector also aspires for an end to the occupation and towards an eventual possible partnership between Israeli tourism and Palestinian tourism based on mutuality and just trading patterns.

The Challenges Ahead- Issues That Need to be Considered

There is an urgent need to investigate tourism developments since the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority and juxtapose this with Israel's tourism policies since the occupation, and, indeed, since the Nakba, 1948. These include:

1. The institutional framework and infrastructure, discriminatory actions and policies, and expose the main challenges facing the tourism industry and how the tourism industry could go from here - the way forward - for Palestine as a tourist destination.

2. The issue of imbalanced trade. Around 2.5 billion USD comes in every year from tourists who visit the Holy Land, especially the Old City of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Unfortunately for the Palestinian tourist agencies, most of the money goes to Israeli agencies. This is a direct result of unfair competition. The factors contributing to this inequity need to be removed.

3. Rumours are spread that travelling in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is not safe because of terrorism when in fact not one tourist has ever been targeted by terrorist organizations.

4. Movement restrictions on Palestinians (in this case the guides and tour operators) give them a great disadvantage in comparison to their Israeli competitors. For example an Israeli agency has the ability to pick up incoming guests from the airport while Palestinian agencies need to apply for a permit to go into Israel.

5. Restrictions on construction activities in the West Bank (Area C) slow down the development of the tourist sector; while, at the same time Jewish colonies are building hotels and resorts.

6. Israeli tourist agencies make no distinction between the West Bank and Israel. For example, maps do not show the border between Israel and the West Bank. As a result tourists get the impression that all the sites they visit are within Israel.

7. Israeli tourist agencies have no problem whatsoever passing checkpoints and taking tourist into Palestinian territories, whereas Palestinian agencies are unable to organize tours to Israel.

8. The annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel has placed the most important tourist attractions in the West Bank under complete Israeli jurisdiction.

9. Palestinian tourism enterprises in the rest of the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip have been deprived of markets, finance, training and policy guidance under military occupation, which pays scant attention to the complex needs of this potential vital sector of the Palestinian economy

10. The presence of Jewish colonies in the West Bank damages some historical sites. Since some of the colonists are active in the tourist sector, they become a major competitor for a share of the tourist dollars.

Issues to be Examined for the Way Forward

In striving to meet the challenges that lay ahead the following issues need to be examined:

1. Policies and practices that can enhance the situation of Palestinian tourist agencies
2. Settlements on the West Bank, which according to several international and bilateral agreements should be dismantled, should not be active in the tourism sector.
3. Israeli policy makers should refrain from favouring Israeli agencies when it concerns West Bank activities, be just with permits for Palestinian tourist guides, create a just and equal relationship with Palestinian tourist agencies and acknowledge the existence of the West Bank.
4. Damage caused to archaeological sites should be compensated.

Other Options

1. Investment in accommodation and infrastructure, facilities for tourists,
2. Restore historical sites,
3. Create liaisons with tourist ministries abroad, promote Palestinian tourist agency services at international fairs, and market Palestine as a distinct destination in countries whose people are most likely to visit the country and make them aware of the Palestinian land.
4. Offer the 'tours less taken' (Alternative/Justice tours/pilgrimages)

In the final analysis, the Palestinian tourism sector needs an urgent and just peace as a pre-condition to achieve its potential.

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***Raising Awareness
Tourist Locations occupied post 1967 by Israel***

Written by ATG-Study Center

Introduction

Tourism is an important factor in Palestinian society, as it comprises 13% of the GDP of the country; one can claim that the wellbeing of hundreds of families is earned from tourism. The Palestinian Authority, represented by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, relies greatly on tourism to promote the Palestinian situation. This reliance on tourism, whether touristic, religious, or even political, and the number of visitors coming to Palestine, is a difficult issue to control, due to the severely limited control the PA has over its borders. Moreover, due to the political situation, and the constant land grab by Israel, Palestine is losing a great deal of its natural resources, such as water; but it is also losing tourist sites, that would benefit the Palestinian economy, should the Palestinians have control over them. Needless to say, any given government works hard, and provides a great deal of financial assistance and subsidies to tourist sites, in order to see a financial return from that assistance to the country, but again, due to the financial difficulties imposed on the PA by the Occupation, Palestine can hardly afford to pay salaries, let alone maintain tourist sites or improve them.

This is an eye opening paper as to some of the locations occupied by Israel, based on criteria that will be further developed within this research. It will look into sites in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. Jerusalem is an occupied city, separated into East and West. West Jerusalem has been predominantly settled by Israelis and East Jerusalem is the Arab side of town. Despite the fact that East Jerusalem is the most visited area in Palestine tourist-wise, due to the presence of religious sites such as the Via Dolorosa, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, permission is required for Palestinians living in the West Bank to access the area, and much difficulty is imposed on Palestinians living in the area of East Jerusalem.

According to the Oslo Accords, the West Bank has been divided into

different Areas: A, B and C. Area A is under the full civil and security control of the PA. Area B is under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli-Palestinian security control. Area C is under full Israeli civil and security control. It is not controversial to say that the Israeli government does not even respect the terms of the Oslo Accords, and has nevertheless managed to make use of some of the tourist locations on Palestinian land to its advantage, either by imposing entrance fees, proclaiming those sites as Israeli National Parks, or building a settlement around those sites. This is also the case in the Occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

Main Body

The potential contribution that tourism could make to the Palestinian economy is staggering. Unfortunately, the tourism market in the Occupied West Bank (along with many other industries) is undeveloped, largely due to Israel's occupation of the territory. There is an abundance of locations throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem that could generate revenue for the Palestinian economy, but they are instead controlled by the State of Israel, which has engaged in several activities in the West Bank that are illegal according to International Law, such as confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction of settlements and the Illegal Apartheid wall, as ruled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). "Through the occupation, Israel creates exclusionary mechanisms and profits at the cost of the Palestinians, and, thus, virtually appropriates what is not its entitlement" explains Rami Kassis, director of the ATG.

More importantly for our purposes, however, Israel has claimed many sites of historical significance and natural beauty within the West Bank for itself, even going so far as to label some of them 'Israeli National Parks.' "Israel employs a whole gamut of unfair trade practices to deprive the Palestinians of their rightful share of revenues. For, after all, a large number of the historical and religious sites for the pilgrim, ordinary tourists, study groups, and solidarity activists, are in Palestinian areas."

It is arguable that the designation as national parks of some areas in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the northern part of the country, is indicative of the Israeli government's intention to eventually confiscate all of the West Bank (how brazen it is - for any country - to create a national park located outside its national borders!). This being the case (with all its potential implications) and the fact that Israel should not be monetarily benefiting from tourist sites in the West Bank, it is logical to raise awareness as to those locations so tourists know that the money they are paying for entrance fees, is lost revenue for the Palestinians, and gained profit to the occupying country.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) is the “caretaker of the land of Israel on behalf of its owners- the Jewish people everywhere”. In other words, one may argue that the Israeli government, and especially the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, the governmental body that manages the national parks in Israel, is working for the JNF. The JNF is said to be a non-governmental body, although initiated and started by Theodor Herzl. Its role, other than financially funding projects that serve the State of Israel, is to evict Palestinians from their homes. According to Yosef Weitz, former director of JNF: “the complete eviction of the country from its other inhabitants and handing it over to the Jewish people is the answer”

As stated on the JNF website “Over the past 109 years, JNF has evolved into a global environmental leader by planting 250 million trees, building over 210 reservoirs and dams, developing over 250,000 acres of land, creating more than 1,000 parks, providing the infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, bringing life to the Negev Desert and educating students around the world about Israel and the environment”. To the casual reader, this information sounds very promising and environmentally friendly, but on the ground this translates as Palestinian homes and lands demolished and stolen, and people evicted in order for the JNF to proceed with its work, under the protective eye of the government.

Powerful as it is, the JNF is an active arm of the Israel government, and has been the leading force pushing for acceptance of the Prager Plan , which aims at kicking Bedouins out of the land in the Negev. It is with this mentality that Israel takes land from Palestinians and uses it for its own benefit.

“The Knesset’s decision to move forward with the Prager Plan supports the plans of the JNF, which owns 13 percent of the land and explicitly only allocates it to Jews. The JNF is also currently engaged in a \$4 billion “Blueprint Negev” project to ensure that the area has a majority Jewish

population. The plan includes economic development projects that seek to attract young Jewish Israelis and Jewish westerners to move to the Negev. Despite the centuries that Bedouin people have been living there, ethnic/religious identity alone is being used as a criterion for who has access to the land". Racist as it is, the Praver plan has not yet passed fully into law, fortunately for the Bedouins, but it shows how powerful the JNF is to let the Knesset work for it. Its progress in the Knesset has been delayed, and Minister of Agriculture Yair Shamir has replaced Benny Begin at its head, thereby boding ill for the Bedouins, since he has a far worse reputation and attitude than Begin.

The intentions of this research should be made clear. Simply put, it is an attempt to raise the awareness of visitors to what the Israeli government is doing towards the Palestinians. It is also a means to pressure Israel into recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people and to discontinue its illegal activities in the Occupied Territories, specifically its possession of tourist sites located outside its own internationally recognized borders. By raising awareness towards those sites, one would hope that the international community can pressure Israel not to force its occupation on those sites, and hopefully minimize the financial benefits that Israel gains from those sites.

It is important to emphasize that this research does not extend to sites found within Israel's pre-1967 borders; it is merely an effort to raise awareness on this issue and perhaps that the international community will pressure Israel to stop overstepping its bounds and accept its own legal limitations. To summarise: the Palestinian economy should be benefiting from these sites, but instead, Israel's does. Relinquishing its control of tourist sites in the Occupied Territories would go a long way towards assisting the development of the Palestinian tourism market and the economy as a whole, so it is of critical importance to give Israel an incentive to do so. A large-scale campaign such as this has been effective in past cases, such as ending the apartheid era in South Africa. History

has shown that an international campaign can, in fact, assist greatly in the fight for equal rights, so it should also be viewed as a viable option for the contemporary Palestinian issue.

This paper will concentrate on locations eligible for the conditions mentioned below, and based on initial research; we have cited over 32 main locations, 10 in Jerusalem, 15 in the West Bank, and seven in the Golan Heights. However, taking into consideration the limitations faced during the research, there may be more locations to which this research will not refer.

Most important of these locations are the "City of David" archaeological park in Jerusalem, Qumran National Park and Herodion in the West Bank, and Nimrod Fortress in the Golan Heights.

The first requirement for inclusion in the study has been that the site must be located outside Israel's pre-1967 borders. Such areas include the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Second: it must be Israeli-controlled. Third: a visitor must pay a fee to gain entrance to the site. Next to those criteria, one must refer to the sites located inside colonies in the West Bank. Palestinians, unless a permit has been obtained in advance from the Israeli government, are not allowed to enter colonies, sites located inside a colony or on the outskirts of one, due to the presence of security checkpoints which deny Palestinians entry. Thus, paying a fee is not necessarily a criterion for those sites inside colonies, as a Palestinian ID card might be the "fee" or "fine" for non-entry.

Since 1967, specifically after the Six Day War, Israel re-occupied the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. Having done so, everything was under their occupation until the signing of the Oslo Accords and arrival of the Palestinian Authority. Before that, Palestine was under civil administration by the Israeli government. When the PA was set up, as a result of the Oslo Accords, Palestine and more specifically the West

Bank was divided into 3 main zones, Areas A, B and C. Jerusalem and the Golan Heights remained under full Israeli control.

There are diverse reasons why most sites that this research has looked into are still under Israeli control or have been transformed into Israeli National Parks. They are not only financial reasons.

Israel has a known history for changing events and facts and re-shaping or re-framing history. By claiming a site in the West Bank, not only has Israel confiscated and stolen more Palestinian land, but it has also re-written the story about those locations.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Palestine, is arguably the holiest place in the world. For Christians, Jerusalem houses, amongst many other Christian sites, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus was resurrected after his burial. To Muslims, Jerusalem houses the third holiest place in Islam, Al-Aqsa Mosque/Dome of the Rock. As for Judaism, the Western Wall is arguably the most sacred of places within Jerusalem or world Jewry.

Jerusalem is an occupied city, like many other cities in Palestine. Palestinians living in the West Bank must obtain permission from the Israeli government to enter, work, pray or live in it. Obtaining those permits is a highly sophisticated procedure, as one may be denied permission, for no specific reason, and at many times, a reason is not given. For Palestinians, Muslim and Christian alike, Jerusalem is not only a city where one can go and enjoy the nice atmosphere, but it is also a religious city, where many Palestinians wish to practice their religious rituals and beliefs. Needless to say, there is no presence whatsoever of any Palestinian governmental bodies in the city, except for some charitable or humanitarian organizations or initiatives which care for the city, or people and their well-being.

It also goes without saying that due to the absence of a Palestinian governmental body, Israel controls both the west and east side of Jerusalem. As one may imagine, due to the reasons mentioned above, Jerusalem has a high number of tourist attractions and receives a high number of tourists per year. Those tourists, whether local or international, wish to visit the religious sites of the city. Needless to say, those sites are all controlled by Israel, physically and financially, and they control the story, and are the only beneficiaries of the financial aspect, and the political aspect, as they get to tell their own story.

All sites presented here are more or less claiming Jewish presence, history and identity in order to keep the Jewish prerogative over the land. Jerusalem, as the proclaimed capital of Israel, has not proved one single fact of Jewish identity. There are no remains or proof of the temple of Solomon nor is there any legitimate proof of Jewish religious practice or anything that can be related to it. Nevertheless, Israelis are forcing or forging the authenticity present underground and under “buildings” by referring to the vaults and tunnels of the City of David.

This research will give the “City of David” as an example to explain how this site is used for tourism, and how it is also used as a propaganda tool against Palestinians, especially those that are most affected by the site , the Jerusalemites.

Not only has this research been done in office, but a number of field visits have been taken to the City of David to collect information.

The City of David's Archaeological Park

Entrances fees: 29 Adults, 23 Students, 15 Youth and senior Israeli citizens, Free for soldiers.

60 NIS guided tours

Visitors: around 450,000 a year.

The City of David is the Israeli name for an ancient core of settlement in Jerusalem dating back to the Bronze Age, which is now a major archaeological site, considered by many as one of the most important archaeological sites in all Jerusalem. It annually draws hundreds of thousands of Israelis and foreigners over the Green Line into the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Silwan.

Located just outside the walls in the centre of Jerusalem, right next to the Dome of the Rock, and the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan.

“The village of Silwan, in East Jerusalem, contains the remains of the most ancient part of Jerusalem, often termed “The City of David”. In recent years the excavation and presentation of the archaeology of Silwan has been placed in the hands of a Jewish settler NGO, whose incorporation of the site into the Jewish Israeli narrative is multi-faceted — mixing religious nationalism with theme-park tourism. As a result, conflict with local Palestinians occurs at the very basic level of existence, where the past is used to disenfranchise and displace people (there have even been killings) in the present. The volatile mix of history, religion and politics in the City of David/Silwan threatens any future reconciliation in Jerusalem, which must be based on the empowerment of local people and adoption of a pro-active, inclusive archaeological stance in which the many voices of the past are heard.

The City of David has been classified as a National Park since the early 1970s. Yet since 1997, the settler organization El'ad - meaning “toward the city of David” in Hebrew, is supervising the park, while the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority's daily involvement with the site is minimal.

El'ad, as mentioned above, is a Jewish settler NGO, privately driven by a right-wing ideology whose aim is to settle Jews in East Jerusalem, specifically Silwan neighbourhood. It is the operating hand that controls the park, provides the materials, signs and attractions and the fees collected at the entrance, and from guided tours and the gift shop, go to them. El'ad funds the majority of the archaeological excavation in and around the city, thanks to the charitable donations it receives. Although it refuses to publish the names of its sponsors and donors, it has a wall of fame for donors at the Hezekiah's Tunnel found under the city, and inside the City of David Visitors' Centre. This is done to encourage other people to sponsor these excavations, and a few empty spots have been left for people who wish to donate.

As part of the fun attraction at the tunnel, school trips and summer camp groups are constant at the location. The idea of going with a flash light into a tunnel with water up to 70 cm in depth is fun. However, because they are this close to "Palestinians" in Silwan, those trips (the ones that we have witnessed)were accompanied by armed gunmen.

There is not enough evidence to assure whether or not the site actually was that of David's Palace. However, as signs in the location state "Other Scholars contest this View". There is of course dubious information written on signs about the findings. As one may find in these long explanations about the excavation there is no real interpretation about the "other scholars' views who contest the written view".

The tours offered at the park (guided by Jewish Israeli guides) are either conducted in English, Hebrew, French or Russian, as are most of the signs present on site. There is not enough information to assure whether the site actually was that of David's city, but El'ad has created an image of strong connection to Jewish History alone. Although David was also a prophet, in the view of Isla, Arab and Islamic interest is completely ignored during the tour, with minimal mention of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the excavations taking place under it.

The tour passes through the neighbourhood of Silwan, and when walking through the village, two Palestinian children walked by, as there is a children's activity centre right next to the visitor's centre: one tourist asked about the safety of the area, and the guide answered that it is safe enough due to the armed men and the security fence around the visitor's centre.

To the people of Silwan the park affects their daily life, as they are constantly threatened by house demolitions. El'ad's plan is to extend the park until it reaches the Kidron Valley. In order to do so, an increasing number of demolition orders have been issued for Silwan's houses that have been constructed without a permit from the Israeli authorities as hardly any are ever given to Palestinians in East Jerusalem as a mechanism to force them out of the city and prevent expansion. Silwan is always harassed by settlers accompanied by soldiers, and today more than 70 settler families have settled in Silwan, and are forcing Palestinian families out. Soldiers, Border Police, General State Security officials ("Shabbak") and private security guards are always present in the area, as well as the various fences and the ubiquitous security cameras.

In Jerusalem alone, there are many sites that Israel controls and from which it profits financially. Not only that, but the Israeli government, in order to limit Palestinian profits in Jerusalem, banned development of Palestinian infrastructure and enterprises. For example, Palestinian owned hotels are not allowed to expand and increase the numbers of rooms in their hotels. By doing so, Israel is forcing agencies and tourist operators to use Israeli hotels in high season when all Palestinian hotels are fully booked, meaning an increase in the income of the Israeli hotels. "The development of tourist sites, particularly in Area C, is actively prevented by Israeli authorities"

Conclusion

To sum up, the sites about which we are raising awareness have all been taken by force from the Palestinians, have been occupied and are now used for the benefit of Israel. Many of those sites either carry a political dimension, or a religious one. For Palestinians, those sites represent more than just financial income: for them, they are places of worship. The financial return that the Israeli government achieves from those sites is immense, reaching millions of dollars. Moreover, the quieter we continue to be about such locations and such ways of dealing with religious sites, the more the Israeli government will continue to steal land, re-shape history and profit financially.